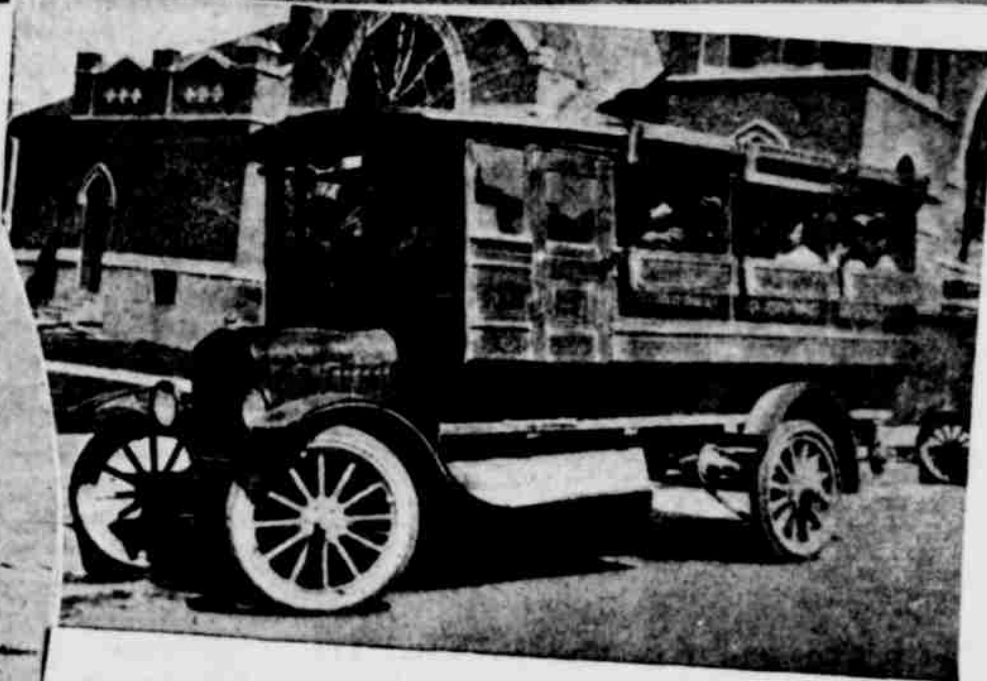


English Taught in New Mexico

A Story of
Our Native
Spanish-
American



Above—A rural schoolhouse in the Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico.
Below—A schoolhouse in the Sandia Mountains, New Mexico.
Note the wild and rugged country surrounding it.



Above—This is one of the Bernalillo County high school buses that carries students to and from their homes out in the country.
At left—A rural New Mexican school teacher and two of her pupils.

By H. W. PATTON

"I WILL speak English."

Supposing you are a schoolboy or girl and every time, during school hours, you uttered a word in the language of your fathers and your forefathers, which also is your common language, you are compelled to write the foregoing sentence 500 times as a penalty, would it cure you?

That is what the schoolboys and girls of New Mexico have to do if teacher overhears them speak a word in Spanish during school hours. If you do not think writing this short sentence 500 times is a task, try it! It means 8,500 strokes of a pen or pencil, and no boy or girl could do it in one session "after school," so the penalty is spread out, and the lesson is therefore all the more valuable to the "culprit."

At least 60 per cent of the people of New Mexico speak the Spanish language—some say they form 80 per cent of the population. These people resent being called Mexicans. They say they are Spanish-Americans, but Spanish is the language of their homes, and, of course, their children, of which they have many, speak Spanish with them. The youngsters speak Spanish among themselves outside of school hours, so it is difficult for them to stick to English during school hours, especially on the playgrounds at recess. However, with thoughts of writing "I will speak English" 500 times before them, they try to be careful. One hears much better English among the Spanish-American children of the cities and towns than among those in the rural districts. In the towns they mingle with real Americans, and naturally learn to talk English well. The children of the rural districts speak it in a much slower and studied manner.

The language question is one of the biggest problems the public school authorities of the newest state in the Union are facing, for it is realized that to become real Americans the people must speak the language of Americans. In the mountain districts adults are attending night school to learn English, but elsewhere efforts are being concentrated on children. Of course, the school children in the mountain districts are compelled to learn English and speak it during school hours, the same as the children in other districts.

New Mexico is rich in resources, and education is needed to develop these resources. Therefore the school system of the state is one of the best in the West.

Every facility is offered for boys and girls to attend school; in fact, they have to do it until they are 16 years old.

One often reads how great men of today walked miles to country schools in their boyhood. They tramped through rain and snow to obtain the rudiments of an education, but these little Spanish-Americans of New Mexico don't have any such hardships. In the first place, it rains very little in the state, and snow, except in the mountain districts, is rare. But even with almost ideal weather conditions these boys and girls in the rural districts of the Rio Grande Valley don't walk. Every school district has buses to take the children to school and bring them home again.

True, the country buses are not elaborate affairs, but they are comfortable. The counties provide the buses and let the job of transporting the children out on contract, the man landing the contract providing the horses and their sustenance. Each contractor gets from \$40 to \$50 a month for this service, but he makes only two trips a day, which gives him considerable time around his ranch. It also is provided in the contracts that if there is anything the children ought to see in the cities or towns, the contractors must drive them in.

Bernalillo County has a fine high school in Albuquerque, and students from many sections of the county attend, as well as hundreds from the city. The students from the rural districts don't have to worry about getting to school and home again, for the county has provided motor buses for their transportation, and this is free, too.

There are some beautiful little schoolhouses in the Rio Grande Valley, the architecture of the fronts of many giving a strong hint of old Spain. The schoolhouses in the mountain districts are not so attractive, but they are comfortable. Every school has its playground, and a great number of them have basketball courts, this game being a favorite among Spanish-Americans.

For four months I lived close to one of the rural schools in the valley, and watched the children at their studies and at their play. They seem apt pupils and eager to learn. The school yards are always dusty, but this never bothers the boys, for almost without exception they wear overalls. I learned something about the little girls. After they are well away from school and out of hearing of teacher they are not a bit backward about approaching a stranger, with this request:

"Da me una niquelle?"

Spanish is not one of my accomplishments, so I said to the first one, a girl of eight or nine:

"No savvy."

When she discovered that I spoke English, she said:

"Give me a nickel to buy candy."

After that, whenever any of the children said "Da me una niquelle" I knew what was meant. It was peculiar that none ever asked for so small a coin as a penny.

The teachers in the schools in the valley have it comparatively easy compared to those in the mountain districts. In the valley the schools are all graded, the

number of pupils determining the number of teachers. In the mountains there is only one teacher to each school. There are 15 such schools in the Sandia Mountains in Bernalillo County, and the majority of the teachers undergo genuine hardships, said Miss Irene Burke, county superintendent of schools.

"Some of the districts over there in the mountains become snowbound," said Miss Burke, "and the teachers are sometimes isolated for weeks, even months. Even when the snow leaves, the roads are very often impassable because of mud, so they are compelled to stay right in their little communities."

"There are a couple of American settlements in the mountains, and the teachers in those districts fare a little better. The others are all Spanish-American settlements, and the teachers have to live with these people, only getting out for a look at real civilization occasionally. The teachers in such districts usually rent a room in a humble Spanish-American home and do their own cooking."

The only way of reaching the mountain schools is by motor car or wagon, and to reach some of them, one must travel away around the north of the mountains and down the other side.

Three of the schools in the valley have running water, and one has its own power plant. Domestic science, with electrical equipment, has been introduced in three of these rural schools, and the Spanish-American girls are taking to it in great shape. Many of them were good cooks before the schools began teaching domestic science.

The county employs a school nurse, whose duty it is to visit both the valley and mountain schools. She examines the pupils for affected tonsils and adenoids. If the parents of afflicted children are too poor to pay to have the trouble removed, there are always volunteer physicians to perform the service. Vaccination, which is compulsory, is free, too.

While I was in Miss Burke's office, a gray-haired Spanish-American came in and overheard some of the conversation.

"Yes, it's nothing like the old days," he said. "When I went to school out here each boy was required to bring a few sticks of wood to school every day to keep the fire going. We didn't have a bus to take us home, either."

Does this educational work among a foreign-speaking population pay?

Any New Mexican, whether he is a native-born American or a Spanish-American, is emphatic in his reply in the affirmative. It is pointed out that the state is making great forward strides. Attention also is called to the unusually large number of Spanish-Americans from this state who enlisted in the World War. One also is referred to the number of Spanish-Americans who volunteered for service on the border and in old Mexico following the Villa raid on Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916. Those occasions were real tests of what education in Americanism is doing, the average New Mexican says.